

# TEAROOM TALES

Sisters **Debbie Jones** and **Lynda Potter** are brewing it for themselves



**D**ebbie Jones (pictured above right), who runs the Georgian Tea Rooms on historic Chestergate, Macclesfield, with her sister, Lynda Potter, pours out the stories of the ups and downs of establishing a business in an unfamiliar town in Cheshire.

We knew the kitchen would be a challenge. The previous incarnation served lots of fried food, as evidenced by the copious grease coating every surface and the unpleasant smell. The deep-clean people refused to clean the cooker so six of us slid the six-hob monster along the greasy floor, out of the room and up into the scrap truck. After a professional scrub-down of the kitchen, we focused on the floor.

We'd decided to use the flooring company a few doors up from the tea rooms and on the appointed day, the fitter arrived to remove the old lino floor and fit the carpet. Underneath where the cooker had been was a large metal plate. When the fitter started removing the old flooring, he found himself suddenly ankle-deep in filthy, foul-smelling water.

The kitchen now looked like the Trevi Fountain in Rome, without the horses. Of course, laying the new floor on a floodplain was impossible so, worried we'd uncovered something terrible, we called a plumber. I was convinced the metal plate was a manhole cover and we had a huge drain problem. As it turned out, the metal plate was just a metal plate and the lino flooring, according to the plumber, had trapped months if not years of water that had seeped underneath and formed a small underground lake. We got to work with our mops and buckets and left the floor to dry out. This took over a week. Finally, the fitter came back and by the end of that day we had a clean, dry, lovely new kitchen floor.

The bar area in the tearoom, by contrast, just needed a good clean – or so I thought. It had a raised wooden platform floor and fitted beer pumps that we had removed. The beery smell remained, however, but I was sure a thorough scrub and fresh air would remove it. Soon after, I was tipping away two-year out-of-date tonic water down the sink when my foot went straight through the floor. It transpired there had been a leak from one of the beer pumps and over the years, it had not only soaked through the wood but had rotted it too, so it was spongy and unsafe. Further investigation showed that underneath the floor was a deep puddle of stale beer. We had no choice but to strip the rotten wooden floor back to the concrete and start again. The



## Water, water everywhere... before there's tea to drink

**above:** The Georgian Tearooms mural: over the top but a perfect backdrop to cake and a cuppa. Photo: Kirsty Thompson

kitchen and the new counter took several weeks to sort, so our planned opening date was looking more and more unlikely.

After this disappointment – in terms of costing us more and a delay in opening – it was nice to have something good to focus on: the mural. This is positioned to the right of the door as you come into the tearoom and takes up the whole wall. The previous owners had wallpaper that represented a brick wall; I wanted something more in keeping with my vision for a relaxing, welcoming space. So, after a lot of online searching, I found just what I wanted. It was a Renaissance picture, seen through a

columned stone arch, of a life-size parkland lake with swans, tumbling wisteria and peacocks. It is totally over the top, but for us – absolutely perfect. As luck would have it, our accommodating painters and decorators agreed to hang it for us. And when it was finished, both our hearts skipped a little beat. We could start to see our Georgian tearoom rising from the rubble.

Next month I'll tell you about the chairs, sourcing all the bone china and how we decided which cakes to bake. ●

### THE SISTERS

**Lynda Potter** is a former head of science at a secondary school in Surrey. **Deborah Jones** has been a travel writer and journalist since 2008, writing under the pen name **Olivia Greenway**